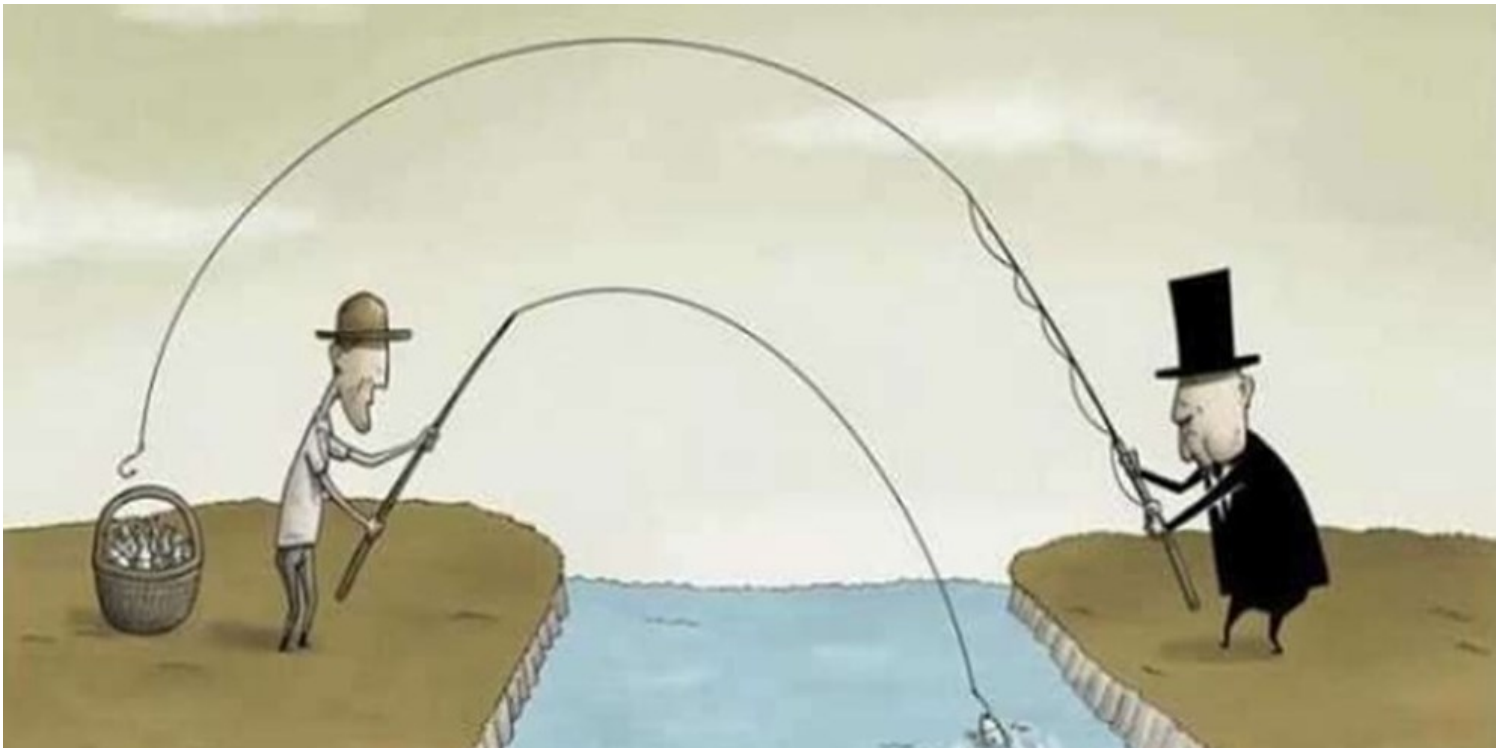
Organise! join IWA. Friends Status at Centenary Congress

Politician, hypocrite, scab

Strike wave continues

BLACK STAR

CAPITALISM



Right about now, many households in Northern Ireland will be receiving or have received their energy bill payments. Devised as part of the British government's Energy Bills Support Scheme there is an added £200 from the Alternative Fuel Payment scheme, particularly for those in the North who rely on oil heating. We're told the absence of a government at Stormont meant people here getting it months after it was introduced elsewhere, an argument created to divert attention from the fact that this is a payout from the British exchequer to their friends in the private utility market to the tune of almost £2 billion. This is apparently a 'loan' that will be recouped at some point but in the meantime ensures profits are maintained, mass non-payment of energy bills is prevented, and the gullible feel grateful for a backhander from the state. It follows on the heels of the so-called furlough scheme and even, years before under New Labour, the tax credits regime. All policies that effectively moved money around, cutting welfare and benefits in one area to then con people into believing they were getting handouts elsewhere, and all the time outsourcing to their mates in the private sector who made and continue to make a killing. And all the while, we're told daily that the government can't afford a public sector pay rise. Of course, there's money for the big energy firms (who are already raking in record profits) and the usual big defence budget (£48 billion this year), not to mention the national debt payments, which will be £115.7 billion in the current financial year. This is the essence of capitalism and its relationship with the state beyond the guff spoken about policies and priorities. The hand that we keep hearing all politicians here say they want freed up to put money in our pockets is the same hand that can't keep out of our pockets, stealing our labour to keep themselves in power. Capital in charge and the working class immiserated. Don't believe the lying, manipulative bastards, take back control of your own labour and lives, there's no future but in revolution.

Anarcho-Syndicalists and the Strike Wave

As more and more workers take inspiration from the strike wave it gathers momentum. The Fire Brigades Union is balloting its members for industrial action in what would be the first UK-wide strike over pay by firefighters and control staff since the 2002-03 dispute (a dispute that Organise! were proud to support). Locally train drivers are balloting, teachers are considering strike action, civil servants in NIPSA may join the strike action following a derisory pay offer.

How should anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in particular relate to this upsurge in class struggle on the part of workers? We need to go beyond simply cheering on strike action and we should avoid the political recruitment tactics employed by much of the party political left.

We need to argue where we can that these disputes must be linked together, that the 'cost of living crisis' is capitalism in action and that these attacks are political. In face of the attempt to tighten anti-strike legislation we need to argue for a recognition that the courts primarily serve the bosses not the workers. We need to argue that within and across the existing unions that the weak must be protected by the (relatively) strong. We must avoid silencing criticism of the leadership and strategies adopted in supporting this upsurge in class militancy. Where do we make these arguments? In our publications, our media, in our conversations, in our workplaces and our communities. In the existing Trade Unions that we are members of, in unorganised workplaces. Everywhere we can. In doing this we have to recognise the limitations placed upon us by our small numbers and uneven distribution. If you are reading this and agree with us then take the next step and get involved in building a genuine member controlled and truly revolutionary union movement. One that has the explicit aim for getting rid of bosses and states and replacing the rotten lot with libertarian communism based in our transformed workplaces and communities and putting humanity in control of our lives and destiny.

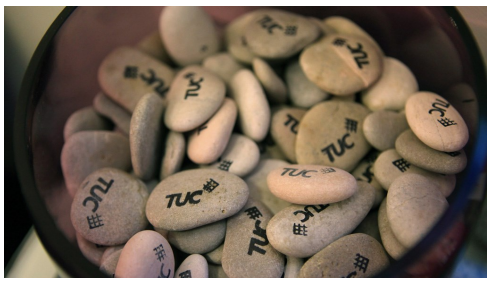
Real solidarity must be built from the bottom up, in real engagement where and when we can with other workers. This means building practical solidarity across Trade Union divisions, it means criticism where it is needed (and it is needed), it means opening up and building upon the space that can be fostered for the development of a meaningful, working-class based revolutionary alternative. That alternative is anarcho-syndicalism - help us build it.

Four Months on Strike Still Undefeated

After voting 99.5% on a 93.5% turnout Northern Ireland Housing Executive workers have been on strike for over four months demanding a pay increase that they can actually live on. An offer of a non-consolidated £1000 and a paltry increase that was nothing more than an attempt to divide the workers backfired. The bosses tactics have not only failed, their absolute fuckery means that in the middle of a homeless crisis (incidentally also of the government's making) there are 193 social housing 'units' lying empty despite having 'live tickets' issued for work to change their tenancy. In addition, more than 4,400 repair and maintenance jobs judged to be an 'emergency' have been left undone and a further 9,600 works deemed routine have not been completed. 246 adaption jobs needed by disabled tenants are also outstanding.

As well paid senior executives and senior officials in the Department for Communities stall the resolve of workers to return to work with a decent pay offer has not diminished.

Change the Law and We'll see you in court...



A bag of pebbles might be more use than TUC waffle

Mistaking the legal system as something neutral is a mistake that the leaders of our reformist Trade Unions seem to make time and time again. As the current strike wave continues, indeed angry workers seem to be pushing for more rather than less strike action, the government have responded by going on the attack. 'Legally' of course!

In a serious twisting of reality government Ministers defending this latest attack are arguing that they want to ensure that safety is maintained. Health workers and Firefighters are among those who have been fighting Tory (and previously Labour) governments for years trying to ensure adequate and safer staffing levels were maintained in the face of decades of privatisation and cuts. The reality is that they want to make legal strike action even more difficult than it has already become.

The unironically entitled Strikes (Minimum Services Levels) Bill would require a minimum number of NHS, transport, education, fire and rescue, border security, and nuclear decommissioning workers to work - effectively forcing workers to break their own strikes. No prizes for guessing how this as yet undefined minimum is to be set. The bosses will simply issue a 'work notice' stating the size of workforce they need to continue the operation. Anyone named on the work notice will lose the right to protection from unfair dismissal if they then participate in the strike! It seems like no coincidence that groups of workers already regarded as troublesome by the bosses and the state are specifically targeted in legislation that Unions have denounced as draconian. Of course there is only one reason that the right to strike is being attacked again. It's also the reason that strike action is the only appropriate response to this latest attack from parliament.

The proposed legislation would apply to England, Scotland and Wales, but if it goes through it would very likely only be a matter of time before it was emulated here.

Rathlin Ferry Dispute

The absolute human need for a ferry service from the island community of Rathlin to Northern Ireland seems too obvious to challenge. And yet it has been challenged by the short-sighted financial concerns of capitalism and local government. The workings of a system built around profit have been exposed again for everyone who cares to see. Far beyond the undoubted importance of the lives and livelihoods of the workers who provide and maintain the ferry the very existence of this entire community would be jeopardised without it. Left to the whims of local politicians and capitalist interests it became all too clear that Rathlin could very easily join a host of other now depopulated and abandoned islands all around the coast of Ireland and Scotland. Faced with workers striking to demand a 'cost of living' pay increase (after 3 years of pay freezes) and 'problems' with the Department of Infrastructure one private contractor, Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd, stomped off and another, Dunaverty Ltd, stomped in. Instead of being constantly held to ransom by capital and state perhaps we need to consider an unfashionable but necessary alternative - workers control.

Politician Hypocrite Scab

Homophobic, misogynist, racist, climate change denier and nakedly sectarian to boot aul Sammy Wilson seems like a bit of an easy target when it comes to singling out politicians for criticism of hypocrisy. Sammy has on occasion shown up at picket lines in 'support' of workers in his constituency. Of course this is nothing more or less than a photo op for him to spout about 'support' and give himself a wee boost - with 'his' East Antrim constituents aye, but more importantly for his ego.

So what's he done this time? Well anyone genuinely supportive of working class struggles, particularly strikes, will be well aware. Sammy, despite his two-faced 'pallyness' on a picket line or two, is the only MP from the wee North and the only non-Tory to vote in favour of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill. Not that that makes any of our politicians real friends of the working class or the non-Tories who voted nae hypocrisy free. But really the man is a particular type of two-faced ballbag.

Edging closer to law the Bill passed its second reading with a majority of 60. 309 ayes and 249 naes. When it gets on the statute books the only real challenge to it will be direct action. First and foremost the strike!

Organise! affiliate to the International Worker's Association

At the international's 28th Congress on the 9th-11th December 2022 Organise! was unanimously accepted as a 'Friends of the IWA' section. The International Workers' Association (IWA) unites anarcho-syndicalist organisations from around the world, improving communication and building solidarity across borders, against capitalism and the state.

We were overwhelmed by the love, support and solidarity of our comrades from across the globe. Delegates attended from Pakistan, Indonesia, Colombia, Chile, Spain, Sweden, Poland, Britain, France, Serbia, Australia, Russia and Norway.

The Congress also celebrated the centenary of the IWA's foundation in December 1922, at a congress in Berlin punctuated by police raids. As our comrades in the Solidarity Federation (the IWA section in Britain) put i:

This was the culmination of many years of international organising between revolutionary unions, during which anarcho-syndicalism emerged as a distinct, coherent movement of the revolutionary working class. In the following decades, many IWA sections were destroyed by fascism and Stalinism, or eclipsed by reformism as the post-WWI revolutionary wave came to an end. But the movement has survived and re-emerged, consistently opposing authoritarianism, reformism, and class collaboration, while holding high the flag of direct action, workers' solidarity, and revolutionary unionism.

This year's congress was hosted by the CNT-AIT of Spain in the city of Alcoy. A wide range of events celebrating the centenary of the international were organised alongside the Congress.

Members of Organise! particularly enjoyed the walking tour which explored the history of the city as the seat of the Spanish section of the First International, as well as the workers' revolt of 1873 known as the Petroleum Revolution. The puppet performance by Puppets from Below was spectacular. Meeting old comrades and new, eating, talking, discussing, a little drinking, singing, re-affirming international solidarity and developing practical plans made for a momentous event for all, particularly the Organise! delegates.

The CNT-AIT were indeed wonderful hosts. From picking up delegates and visitors at the airport in Alicante to everything else that went into organising the week.

Solidarity with the CNT-AIT

The IWA Congress in Alcoi also discussed the continuing attacks that sections of the international face from the International Confederation of Labour. Across the Spanish State the CNT-AIT continue to face attacks on their union from former comrades who are now organised as the CNT-CIT (in English ICL: International Confederation of Labour).

Eighteen unions of the CNT-AIT in Spain are facing lawsuits in the National Court taken by the Spanish section of the ICL, claiming €50,000 in compensation from each. This is on top of attempts to seize union buildings and their resources, and the possible imprisonment of CNT-AIT members as a result of lawsuits. This is an out and out attempt to destroy the CNT-AIT from an organisation which has forgotten anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist principles. Principles including federalism and direct control from the grassroots of the union have been jettisoned as it follows a path towards service unionism, 'professionalised', centralised and vertical organisation. Still decked out in red and black the CNT-CIT have registered the flag, acronym and logo with the Spanish courts. The CNT-AIT are facing an attack that some have sneeringly dismissed as a battle over initials. That is an attitude that suits those who 'have trampled on and destroyed the enormous efforts of many workers to build the anarcho-syndicalist organization and culture'.

Organise!, together with our comrades across the IWA, will act to defend the CNT-AIT from these ongoing attacks and support them in their refusal to give up their union premises their heritage, their militancy and their history. Despite these attacks, and in some instances because of them, the CNT-AIT continues to regain strength. On the attempt to destroy them our comrades are clear: 'Monarchies, dictatorships, infiltrators or police setups have not been able not do it and neither can this unrecognisable organisation'.

Principles of Anarcho-Syndicalism

Affirming the combination of theory and practice developed over the IWA's century long resistance some important changes were made to the Statutes of the IWA. References to revolutionary syndicalism were replaced with the term anarcho-syndicalism to make more explicit our organising principles and end goal - a free stateless communist society.

In a world of oppression and exploitation, the need for a revolutionary, international, working class movement is imperative. Anarcho-syndicalism offers an alternative to utterly bankrupt reformism and state-socialism.

Anarcho-syndicalism is rejuvenating in Latin America, and spreading across Asia, offering hope that a genuinely global struggle may arise. Social revolution for libertarian communism begins in our daily struggles and builds our strength where we work and live.

Anarcho-Syndicalism - global and environmental

The global nature of anarcho-syndicalism and concern with the capitalist destruction of the environment informed intense and wide-ranging discussion at the IWA Congress. One of the IWA international working groups began a discussion on the global impacts of climate change and how we as anarcho-syndicalists have and can effectively respond to the crisis. Comrades from Prima Akcia presented a report and began the discussion, which focused on the practical activity we can pursue as anarcho-syndicalists in and beyond the workplace and in critical engagement with existing environmentalist movements. The uneven impacts of climate change and different responses and tactics possible in different regions and countries were the main topics dealt with. There is not a one size fits all response appropriate to the very real struggles and problems being faced in different parts of our planet. While we are all feeling the impact of climate change places like Pakistan, where the Workers Solidarity Federation has been engaged in essential and inspiring mutual aid work following recent and devastating floods, are bearing the brunt. Comrades from South America talked about the serious environmental struggles going on across the continent and the difficulties facing activists there - including the use of intimidation and often fatal violence against environmentalists in Colombia. Comrades from the CNT-AIT talked about the sweeping forest fires and the 'firefighting' response of the state to a problem that needs to be addressed in a manner that confronts the wanton capitalist pillaging of resources.

Discussion of the experiences of different sections in developing workplace organisation and resistance also took place. The task of this working group will continue to develop strategies for small IWA sections to organise and win disputes in the workplace. This strategy offers practical guidelines based on our real experiences. Sections of the IWA – such as the Polish Union of Syndicalists, Vienna Workers' Syndicate, Priama Akcia, and the Solidarity Federation – have successfully fought workplace struggles despite their relatively small size, through self-organisation and direct action, demonstrating a revolutionary alternative to the bureaucratic and reformist trade unions is possible even for smaller organisations.

Fighting wage theft in Poland
A win for workers
A win for Anarcho-syndicalism

Another worker from Zabka convenience stores was able to get money which he was owed after comrades from the anarcho-syndicalist ZSP in Poland announced its intention to picket the store.

Including wage theft the worker's rights were violated in several ways: first, he was fired for requesting a day off and was not paid for the time he worked in the previous month. He had also been paid less than the minimum wage and was not paid any overtime pay and was illegally employed, with no contract. Besides this, he was subject to working conditions which in Poland are illegal for people under the age of 18.

The day before the picket the bosses caved in. The money owed was transferred to his account. A symbolic picket was nonetheless held the next day in order to inform people of the victory and, as the ZSP put it because 'we think it is only fair that we stress to the bosses that they cannot silence us about what they are doing'.

Zabka is the largest convenience store in Poland. It is rapidly expanding, with over 9000 shops across the country and more than 500 in Warsaw alone. It is owned by the shady CVC Capital Partners, a spin-off of Citigroup. This is not the first struggle the ZSP have been engaged in with Zabka stores as many of their franchised stores 'act in violation of the labor code and cheat workers in various ways,.

In October 2022 the ZSP organized pickets in Warsaw and Grodzisk Mazowiecki at Zabka stores and also managed to get payment for other workers whose wages were stolen. In the past, we held similar actions at a number of shops in Warsaw and other cities in Poland.

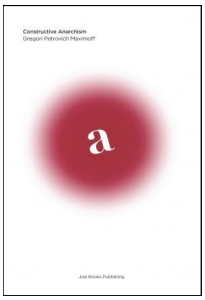
The anarcho-syndicalist ZSP have promised to keep fighting with workers employed at Zabka:

'Our union will keep the pressure up on this chain, which is now a major employer in Poland and an employer of people who are vulnerable to exploitation and wage theft.

Workers are not to be screwed with and we will fight back!'

Just Books Publishing

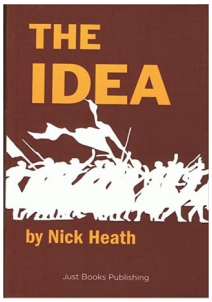
Just Books Publishing, recently set up by the Just Books Collective (an integral part of the work of Organise!), has successfully released its first two titles.



The first is a reprint of Gregori Maximoff's *Constructive Anarchism*, to mark the 100th year of existence of the International Workers Association (IWA) the Anarcho-Syndicalist international founded in Berlin in 1922.

isbn 9781739723705

£11.99



The second title is Nick Heath's *The Idea. Anarchist Communism: Past, Present and Future* - a welcome and new comprehensive work on anarchist communism, this book seeks to rehabilitate the current of anarchist-communism. To make it better known and understood.

*...a good substantial book, and much needed. Lucidly written, it provides a rich brew of engaging discussions of the 'Idea' (anarchist communism as a political philosophy), interesting vignettes of many individual anarchists, and a great historical account of the many anarchist communist organisations over the past 150 years... (*Brian Morris on *The Idea)*

isbn 9781739723712

£18.99

https://organiseanarchistsireland.com/shop/

Down South: Racism and Fascism on the rise

The Taoiseach of the Irish Republic called for tougher border controls and far right Irish nationalists have staged anti-immigrant 'protests' and attacks across the South. From Ballymun to East Wall, Tallaght, Clondalkin, Killarney, Fermoy, Finglas, Drimnagh and elsewhere, the Irish National Party has been stirring up racism, bolstering its support and deflecting working class anger the way fascists know best. Nationalist solidarity, notions of the 'Irish' as somehow superior or more deserving is a notion that infects not just the far right. It is endemic.

Working class people suffering ever increasing hardship and deprivation are mis-directed towards blaming those who have suffered more. Refugees from war, climate change, other poor and working class victims of capitalism are not our enemies. Fascists and the wealthy may be keen to scapegoat others, building on widespread nationalist notions and stoking racism, but we stand with all those working class activists and anti-fascists who countered the far-right and the ignorance they hope to build power off the back of. Class unity against our real enemies demands that we counter nationalism and nationalist sentiment everywhere it rears its head. We must always oppose fascists like the INP but further, we must salt the fertile earth that gives them sustenance.

It should come as no great shock that there are those who want to deflect from the misery that capital has caused to so many by stirring up bigotry and hatred. The far right are undoubtedly benefiting from the housing crisis and seek to promote their anti-working class agenda by scapegoating 'easy' targets. Of course the conditions we all face together as a class are the very same conditions that give rise to resistance that is aimed straight at the cause of the social problems we are currently experiencing as a result of capitalism and the state. This issue of Black Star is full of inspiring examples of workers fighting back! Working class self organisation and solidarity are what are called for in the struggle against racism and fascism and in the struggle against capital and state.

Meanwhile... in Ballymena

End of an era here as local Ballymena hauliers, McBurney, were sold off at Christmas for a measly £140 million, just after its boss, Norman McBurney, retired.

The brother-in-law drove for them a couple of years ago, taking home about £600 a week for fifteen hour days. They've a refrigerated warehouse in Liverpool and spent weeks gurning about the (successful) Liverpool dock strike costing them a fortune on top of the supposed Protocol delays. Their profits from 2021 announced in November stood at a record £11.5 million. It's amazing Norman had the chance to sell it off - to the Europeans!

Get Involved: Help Build A Working Class Alternative.

ORGANISE!

FRIENDS OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' ASSOCIATION · AMIGOS DE LA ASOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE LAS Y LOS TRABAJADORES

WWW.ORGANISEANARCHISTSIRELAND.COM

Organise! is an anarcho-syndicalist group in Ireland which as affiliated to the International Worker's Association as 'friends of' section. We take inspiration from the self directed struggles of working-class people, and particularly the history and tradition of struggle epitomised by the IWA - the anarcho-syndicalist international. Our history goes back to the original formation of Organise! by the Ballymena and Antrim Anarchist Groups in 1985.

We are a small, but growing, group of ordinary working class people who are fed up with being fucked about by the profit system, fed up with seeing our communities and workplaces torn apart by racism, patriarchy, nationalism and sectarianism, and sick of a greedy few getting rich off everyone else's backs.

We are actively working to promote solidarity in opposition to capitalism, the state, patriarchy and all other forms of oppression and hierarchy. The way we organise reflects the free society we want to create: one based on voluntary association, democratic participation and self-management.

Our members are workers, claimants, students, migrants, unemployed and other working-class people committed to building a libertarian communist union movement actively opposed to all forms of oppression and exploitation.

We want to improve everyday conditions for ourselves and other working class people, but we also struggle for the revolutionary transformation that can create a free and equal society, one based on mutual aid and co-operation. Sound crazy? Maybe it does, but in an era in which it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism the continuation of the present system is even crazier…

The current system isn't working – ill-health, stress and overwork affect more and more people while others are flung on the dole; for increasing amounts of workers it is precarity, zero hours contracts and the stress of being unable to plan or budget our lives; we live in a world of plentiful resources yet millions starve; some people make vast fortunes just because they own companies, land, property or natural resources, but those of us who create the wealth, work the land and build the properties are left struggling to survive; politicians tell us there's no money – not for wages, benefits or local amenities, but there's always plenty for war; both locally and globally the gap between the richest and the poorest sections of society has never been so great; instead of a war on poverty they've got a war on 'benefit fraud', while the same system that creates war, poverty and environmental destruction stigmatises, imprisons and deports the resultant refugees.

We don't think these things are inevitable or coincidental, we think they are related to capitalism – an economic system defined by wage slavery and the accumulation of profit out of other people's work. So we support all workers against their bosses in demanding higher wages and better conditions. We try to intervene practically to support workers engaged in disputes and are also active in our own workplaces and communities. Not only against exploitation but against the multiple oppressions faced by members of the working class in all our diversity.

But it's not just a question of trying to struggle by in a world of exploitation and oppression; we look to a future where workers control production and society in their own interests. And unlike some people who claim to oppose capitalism, we don't want to be a new set of leaders and we refuse to be led by anyone else. We advocate direct democracy in the workplace and through the commune in our communities – working in federation to ensure that the needs of all are met and that no-one is ever again in a position to oppress or exploit another human being.

If you are interested in these ideas, we'd encourage you to explore our website and consider getting involved.

We currently have members in Belfast, Cork, Derry, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and Portadown and are building the organisation on the basis of active involvement and participation. We aren't interested in meaningless 'paper' membership so you can't join by filling in an online form and bunging us a few quid.

To talk to us about joining get the ball rolling, check out our website at https://organiseanarchistsireland.com and send an email to:

organiseasi@gmail.com